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Kahanism Has No Place in the Knesset

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A recent political merger in Israel has caused widespread backlash and raised a prospect that many thought was no longer possible: Kahanists in the Knesset.

With the encouragement of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the *Otzma Yehudit* (Jewish Power) party recently merged with the right-wing religious parties the Jewish Home and the National Union.

The *Otzma Yehudit* party is led by former MK Michael Ben-Ari and has a far-right, ultra-nationalist ideology. Uniquely, even on Israel's right, its members espouse ideas associated with Kahanism.

Kahanism is an extremist ideology which is based on the views of Rabbi Meir Kahane, a violent supremacist who advocated and inspired acts of terror. He and his disciples were rightly banned from the Knesset in 1988 on the grounds that their ideology is '[racist and undemocratic](#).' Kahanist organizations are still defined as terror groups by the U.S. State Department and other global bodies.

Otzma Yehudit's leaders and candidates for the Knesset, Ben-Ari and lawyer Itamar Ben-Gvir, are disciples of Kahane and followers of the racist Kahanist ideology. Ben-Ari was refused a visa to America in 2012 due to his affiliation with *Kach* and has long argued that Arabs should be expelled from Israel. Ben-Gvir has spent his career in law defending right-wing activists accused of terrorism. Hanging in his living room is a photo of Baruch Goldstein, a terrorist who killed 29 Muslim worshippers in Hebron in 1994.

In 2013, Ben-Ari's *Otzma L'Yisrael* failed to pass the electoral threshold to enter the Knesset. Since then, Kahanism has been absent from the Knesset. But now, there is a very real possibility that at least one Kahanist will be in Israel's next Knesset.

Jewish Home's previous leader, Naftali Bennett, recently broke away to create the New Right party with Ayelet Shaked. As a result, Prime Minister Netanyahu became fearful that the Jewish Home (which was polling below the 3.25% electoral threshold) wouldn't get into the Knesset and pushed for them to merge with the National Union and *Otzma Yehudit*.

There has been a harsh response to this merger from across the spectrum. In the US, statements from AIPAC, the *American Jewish Congress* and the *Anti-Defamation League*, condemned the merger with *Otzma Yehudit*. Daniel Sokatch, CEO of the New Israel Fund, commented, "For decades, people who care about Israel across the political spectrum have largely agreed that Kahanists are a danger to Israeli democracy and have no place in its parliament. It is horrifying that Kahanists are now returning to the political arena and are being courted and embraced by right-wing parties and their leadership."

In Israel, a number of NIF-supported organizations have taken action to oppose Kahanists returning to the Knesset. *Zazim – Community Action* started a [petition](#) to disqualify *Otzma Yehudit* from running for Knesset and NIF gathered names in support. The *Israel Religious Action Center* made a [video about the danger](#) of Kahanist ideology, highlighting racist and homophobic statements made by its members.

The *Tag Meir Forum* co-hosted a protest on Saturday March 2nd outside Prime Minister Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem. The protest – '[Jews Against Kahanism](#)' – was also organized by Anton Goodman of the *Oz V'Shalom* organization together with *Meimad*.

At the protest, *Tag Meir* Chairman Gadi Gvaryahu gave a short speech, in which he said, "We came here to protest the desecration of God's name which is being done by a party posing as 'Religious Zionist'. The merger with *Otzma Yehudit* is not only an adoption of Kahane's racist doctrine, but also a confirmation of contempt for the blood of innocent Arabs."

Tags: [Anton Goodman](#) [Ayelet Shaked](#) [Itamar Ben Gvir](#) [Jewish Home](#) [Kach](#) [Kahanism](#) [Knesset](#) [Meir Kahane](#) [Michael Ben-Ari](#) [National Union](#) [Otzma Yehudit \(Jewish Power\)](#) [Oz V'Shalom](#) [Tag Meir](#) [Zazim – Community Action](#)

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